

Planning your elective: Kingston, Jamaica

Why Jamaica?

Jamaica is a former British colony and thus its medical system is similar to that of Britain. It has one medical school, the University of the West Indies, Mona Campus, and its main hospital, University Hospital of West Indies has 550 beds. Both are located in the capital, Kingston. Teaching is in English and university staff enthusiastically welcomes final year medical students from other parts of the world. Electives are offered in almost every speciality throughout the year with preference given for students who will be staying at least one month. In addition, Jamaica is a tourist hot spot so fun can be had.

Health Care in Jamaica

Despite economic hardship, Jamaica has a progressive health care system. It boasts an average life expectancy of about 76 years. Most admissions to public hospitals such as Kingston Public Hospital are due to accidents and injuries so these emergency rooms tend to be very busy. With the increase of a more sedentary lifestyle, come chronic diseases such as hypertension. Despite being in the tropics, infectious diseases are not common.

Safety

Kingston is not a particularly safe place. One would have to try and arrange housing on the campus for easy access (I stayed with friends in the city). Though those interested in Emergency Medicine or Trauma may want to do an elective at Kingston Public Hospital, its neighbourhood is quite unsafe, and gunshots around its campus are not infrequent.

My elective

I was interested in finding out more about the HIV/AIDS situation in Jamaica especially as relating to adolescents. Through UWI-HARP (University of the West Indies HIV/AIDS Response Program), I was able to meet with representatives at the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Education, Youth & Culture to get an official take on the status of the epidemic. (Currently, the HIV prevalence rate is between 1-2% and increasing with case mortality rate over 60% due to the overwhelming stigma attached to the virus and illness that prevents victims from seeking appropriate health care and also due to the fact that anti-retroviral treatment is too expensive for most people) I was able to see HIV/AIDS patients at CHARES, a clinic on the UWI campus, Comprehensive Health Center in Kingston, as well as at Kingston Public Hospital. I also got involved with JAS (Jamaican AIDS Support), an NGO that provides support and care for those affected by HIV/AIDS and advocates for the homosexual community, accompanying their nurses on weekly home visits to the sick.

Contact Information

Dean's Office

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It is easier to set up an elective if you have a faculty contact person who can make sure paperwork and your accommodation arrangements are completed before you commence.

For primary care opportunities or to get involved in the HIV/AIDS clinics or related research the contact person is:

Dr. Tomlin Paul, MD

Community Health & Psychiatry Department

Email: tomlin.paul@uwimona.edu.jm

If you can take medical supplies such as boxes of gloves along with you, that would be very much appreciated. MEDWISH should be able to help out with this.